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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

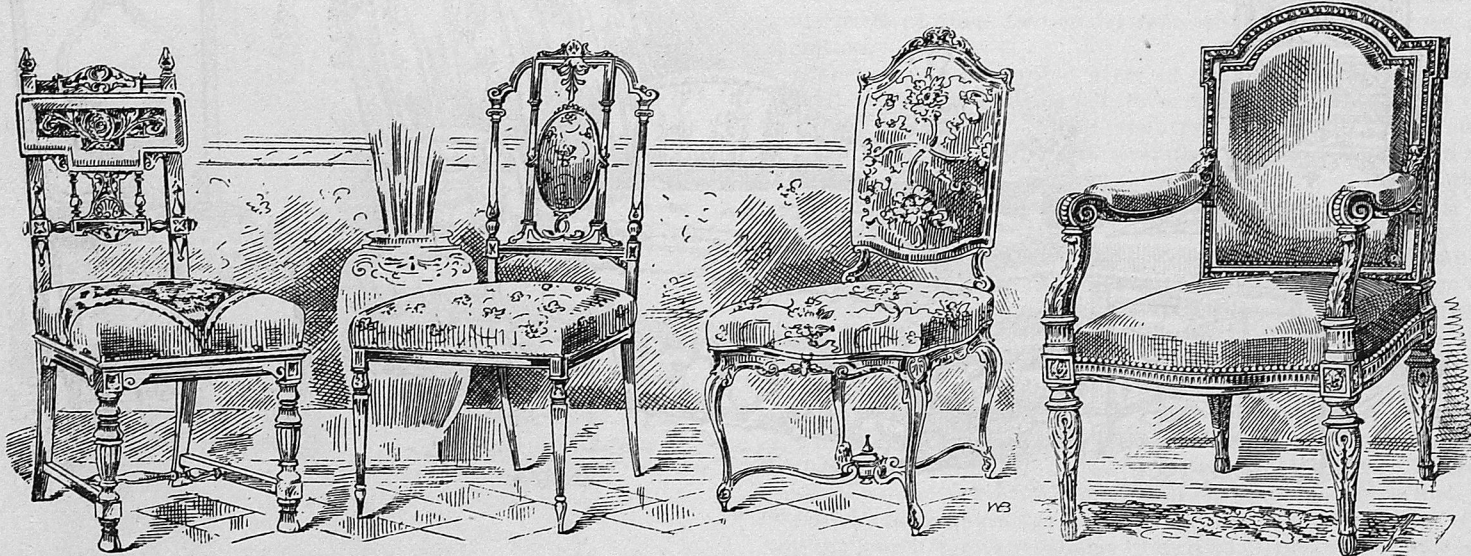
AMONG THE UPHOLSTERERS OF PARIS.

By J. WILLIAMS BENN, OF THE LONDON "CABINET MAKER."

FOR a couple of centuries or more, the words "Paris fashions" have exercised a magic influence over the fair ones of these isles. The phrase has been the making of many a British manufacturer by assisting him to palm off some eccentricity in dress or other adornment. A large portion of those who live to look pretty, worship at the shrine of the Parisian goddess, without any rude questioning of her claims. It did seem some ten years ago that, so far as the appointments of English homes are concerned, British furnishers were prepared to shake off the thralldom which has certainly existed for the greater part of the Victorian era. Several of our leading houses set aside the twists and curves of the French modes, and went in for

signs as are likely to offer some variation from the well-known types. With the object of seeing what freshness of thought could be picked up in Paris, I braved the influenza and went there a few weeks back, and the sketches which occupy these and the following pages are the result of that visit. Not one of them can claim to teach us anything which is absolutely new, but several of the patterns may afford material for reflection and profit.

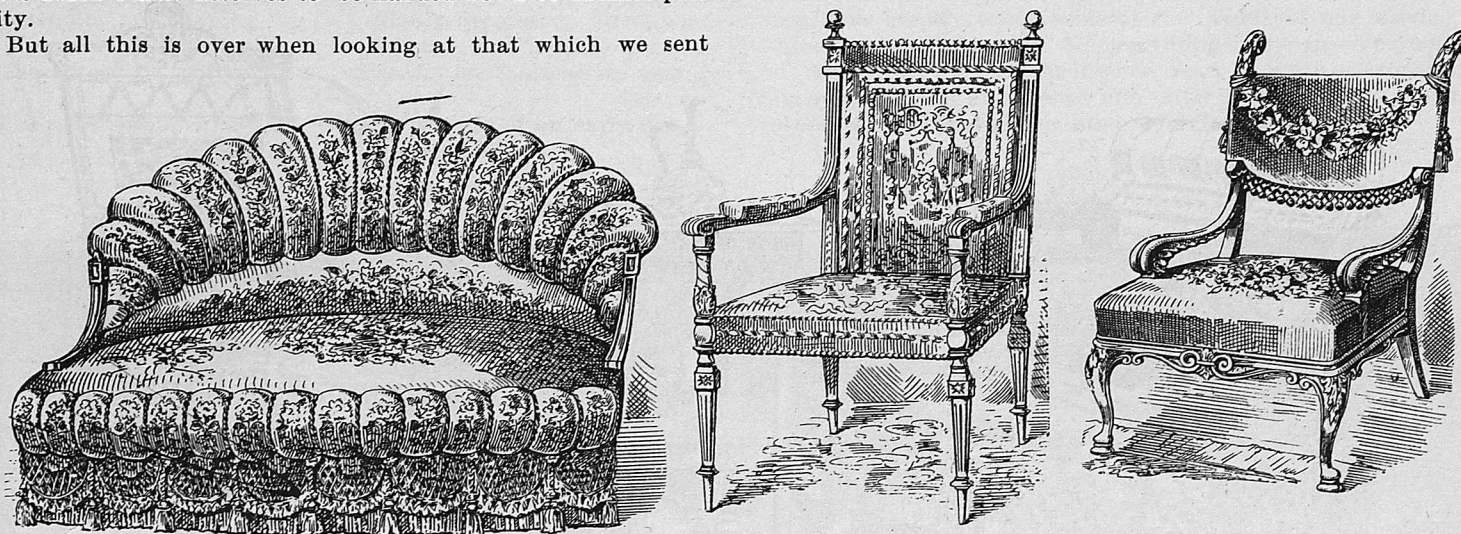
It is in the chairs which our neighbors are constantly producing that we find most interest. Their woodwork, save and except their cabinets and fancy tables, is not of much interest on this side of the Channel. We are unlikely to adopt the French wardrobe or the pair of wooden bedsteads, or buffet, but we are adopting wholesale the seats and fancy articles which Paris produces, so I will ask my readers to stroll in imag-



straight lines and palpably honest construction. Ornament no longer took the place of framing, but was made subservient to the lines of the article. Bitter things were said about the vagaries of the Louis Quinze and the Rococo, and the leaders of artistry declared that this country would never again go begging to Paris for its patterns. At the Paris Exhibition of 1878, it will be well remembered by some of our readers that the Parisians were astonished that we had set up a style of our own, and they were so impressed with it that they immediately set about copying it, calling their version by the singular name of *Gothique-Anglais*. That was certainly a proud position for the British to occupy, and I for one shall always look back with satisfaction at the independent position which our furnishers then took up. The memory of such displays as were made at that exhibition by Messrs. Shoolbred, Walkers, Lucrafts, Ogdens of Manchester, Trollope, Marsh, Jones & Cribb of Leeds, and half a dozen others deserves to be handed down to cabinet posterity.

But all this is over when looking at that which we sent

nation along the boulevards and call with me at those establishments which would rank as Bond Street houses if they were placed in London. If the study of the latest specimens in the French market does nothing more, it may show that the Parisians are not shutting themselves up with Louis Quinze, as we appear to be doing. While that style is certainly much in favor, the Louis Seize and the Empire are also freely courted. For example, the little occasional chair, No. 2, is a very modern rendering of the Empire style. The frame is made of dark mahogany, and the decorations are gilded or ormolu. The side arms, consisting of two pairs of wings, are delicately modeled, the beauty of which is inadequately shown by the sketch. The seat and back are tastefully embroidered with flowers, and the appearance is further enhanced by the bright looking bob fringe and tassels which adorn the back. It is a charming model of what a lady's occasional chair may be.



from this country to the last Paris Exhibition. One is compelled to say with Shakespeare, "What a falling off was there!" So far as the drawing-room and the boudoir are concerned, it is perfectly clear that Paris has succeeded in regaining the position of mentor to our furnishers which she held prior to the time when Taibert and Eastlake invented their straight beaded and spindled furniture. Whatever may be one's likes or dislikes of that somewhat humiliating position, it is clear that our leading furnishers find it profitable and perhaps easy to play second fiddle to their Parisian rivals. While that is so, it is, I think, important to pick from the store of Continental firms such de-

No. 3 is a chair which was displayed in the Rue Capuchins, and its lines are so manifestly comfortable that I give it prominence here with much pleasure. It is a sensible example of Louis Quinze, and full use is made of the freedom of line which that style allows. The shape of the back will suggest some of those old grandfathers' chairs with side pads which have again become deservedly popular. It has a back in which one can find a corner for a weary head; in fact, the body must be very angular which could not have rest in the undulating corners of this fine easy chair. The frame in this case is gilded, and that serves, together with the gay striped silk in which it is uphol-

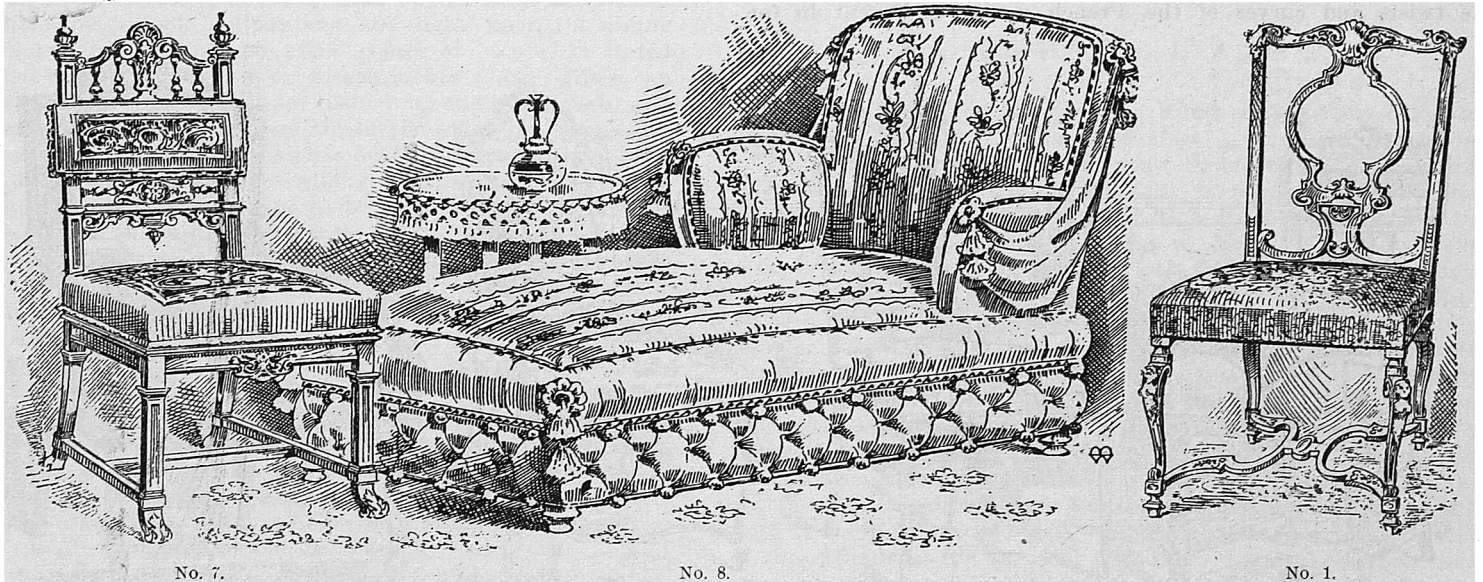
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stered, to make a brilliant *ensemble*, but probably a more severe treatment would better suit the conditions of our sober climate.

While it is clear that Louis Quinze has many admirers in the fashionable capital, it is equally certain that the refined style which was associated with the name of poor Marie Antoinette has not been pushed into the background by its more garish predecessor. In most of the furnishing emporiums which I reviewed, such chairs as are shown in sketch number 6 occupy positions of honor. No. 6 is just the form, without alteration, which was adopted at the Court of Louis XVI., and of its class it would be difficult to improve upon it, especially when it is upholstered, as in this case, with tapestry expressly woven to suit its shape. I noticed, however, some attempts on the part

silk, are treated in the same way, giving the whole article an appearance of individual treatment which is certainly not secured by the use of any ordinary figured material. The cleverly designed trellis fringe, rich in bobs and tassels, which decorates the front, does much to lend magnificence to this captivating specimen of the upholsterer's art.

The "rage" for luxurious saddlebag goods which took us by storm some seasons ago has similarly captured the Parisians; but their patterns are not restrained by that common-sense solidity or utility which usually characterizes our goods. Sketch No. 8 shows a form of couch—a sort of extended easy chair—which has found much favor with our volatile neighbors, and really, when one comes to examine its qualities, it is a most sensible

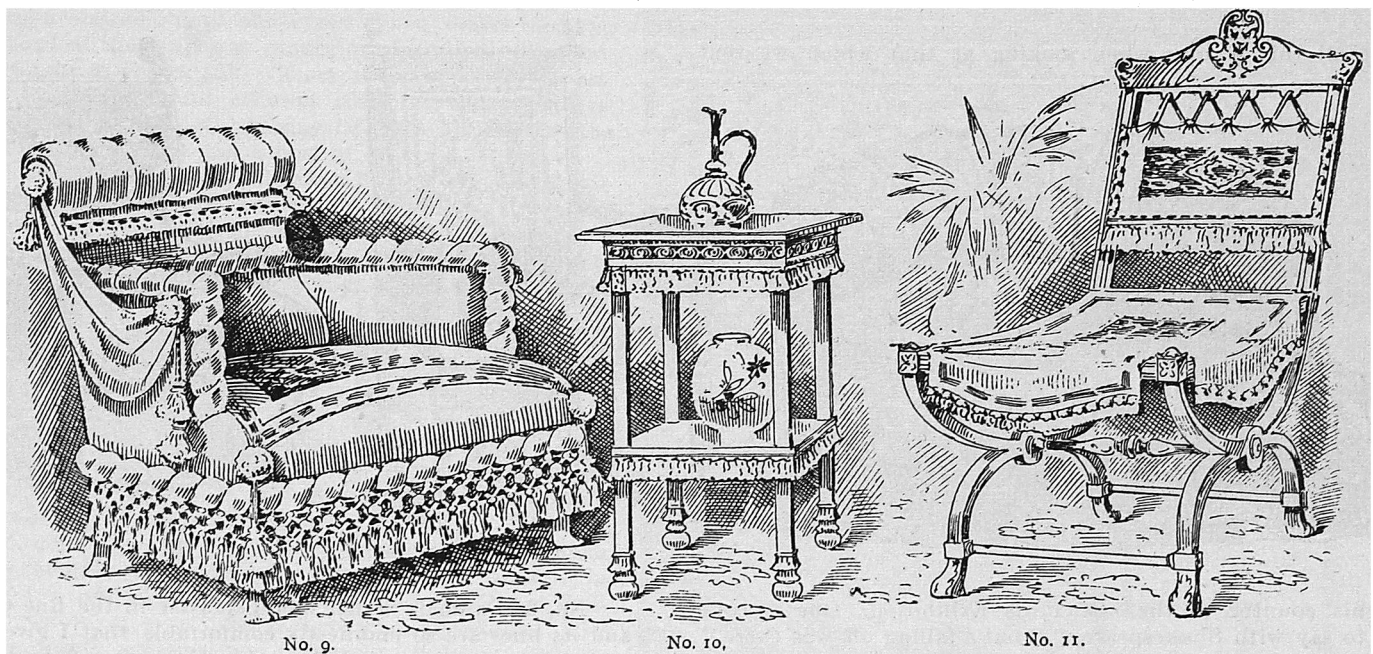


of some modern Parisian chair makers to add to the lines of Louis Seize. It is a mode which will only suffer gentle innovations, say of the class which is shown in No. 4. I refer to the graceful termination of the arms. The sketch hardly shows the easy way in which the myrtle moulding of the back legs is so diverted as to finish round the knob of the arm. The treatment of the covering, too, is worth the attention of those who cultivate artistic novelties in embroidery. A beautiful striped silk is selected, woven in those delicate combinations of color for which Louis Seize is celebrated; and then the "swag" of flowers is embroidered across it. The effect is most charming—indeed, much more pleasing than if the flowers were placed on plain silk or satin. The frame of No. 6 is all gilt, and that of No. 4 cream and gold. Both are patterns which are not unlikely to please the British public for some time to come.

Passing from "show-wood" easy chairs, the glance of upholstering readers may probably be directed to some of the more florid forms of seating which are just now to be seen in the shop

idea. How frequently, when one tumbles into an easy chair, there is a desire to put one's feet up. There is no rest like that which results from having the legs elevated on a level with the body, and this pattern at once gives that form of comfort. Both arms and legs find relief which they certainly miss on an ordinary "German couch." The manner of upholstery which is shown in No. 8 can of course be varied to suit the fancy of the British upholsterer.

Another form of chair, which seemed to me rather original of its class, is that illustrated in sketch No. 9. The back gives the appearance of two chairs being combined in the one pattern, and the effect is not displeasing. Such lines, or bands, of upholstery, when marked out in well chosen materials, do much to make a chair attractive. Indeed, of late the stuffer has not relied as formerly upon the show-wood frame maker for the ornamental or decorative element of his work, but has gone in for some textile carving, so to speak, on his own account. The little table, No. 10, placed by the side of this



windows of the fashionable Boulevards. No. 5 is a fussy-looking miniature settee, which made as brilliant a show amid its surroundings as any window dresser could wish for. The only woodwork which appears, and that is gilded, consists of the two arms or supports at either end. The point of beauty of the whole thing lies in introducing on each separate plush covered puff a special piece of floral embroidery. Further, the space at the bottom of the back and the seat, which are both covered in

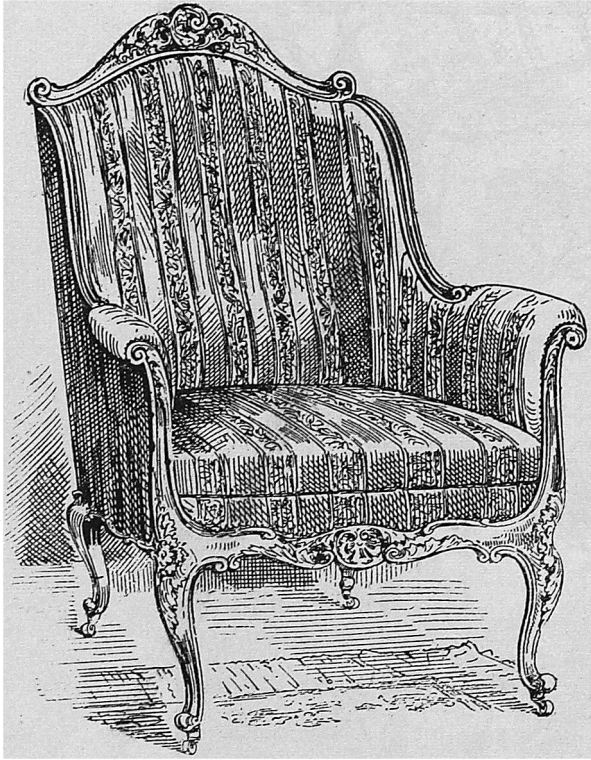
chair, is indicative of the very large sale which such knick-knacks have had both in Paris and London. They happen to accord better than anything else with this fringed and flounced style of seating, and they generally possess a quality of color which is lacking in plain woodwork. My feeling always is, however, that one of these dressed-up beech and deal tables has taken up a place and money which might have been much more profitably devoted to a piece of good honest cab-

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inet work, such as Chippendale and his school delighted to "turn out."

Speaking of our leading craftsman of a century and a half ago brings to my recollection a Parisian pattern which has much in its lines akin to the chairs which he has made famous. Its form is shown in the first sketch, No. 1, and I should not wonder if some admirers of that period set about to reproduce this chair. The form of the back is remarkably quaint and yet easy, and the underpart is full of lively shaping. As a pattern, it represents the transition period between Louis Quatorze and Louis Quinze.

The very ancient model shown in No. 11 always seems to find some favor on the Continent. It cannot be said that such a highly shaped pattern of underframing is well suited to wood, for, plan as one will, there must be much cutting



No. 3.

across the grain. The rails across certainly offer some protection against breakage; but still the construction of such a chair cannot help being faulty. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, however, the decorative effect of X framework will always command admirers, and possibly no other form would adapt itself so well to the class of dressing up which is shown in Fig. 10.

As a type of the modern Parisian drawing-room chair which is neither Louis Quinze nor Louis Seize, but simply French Renaissance, No. 13 will be a useful sample. The backs of many of our chairs are shaping in this highly decorative direction, and if comfort is not sacrificed to spindles and lumps of carving, there need be nothing but praise for such attractive ornament.

The next specimen, No. 14, is Louis Quinze of an early date.

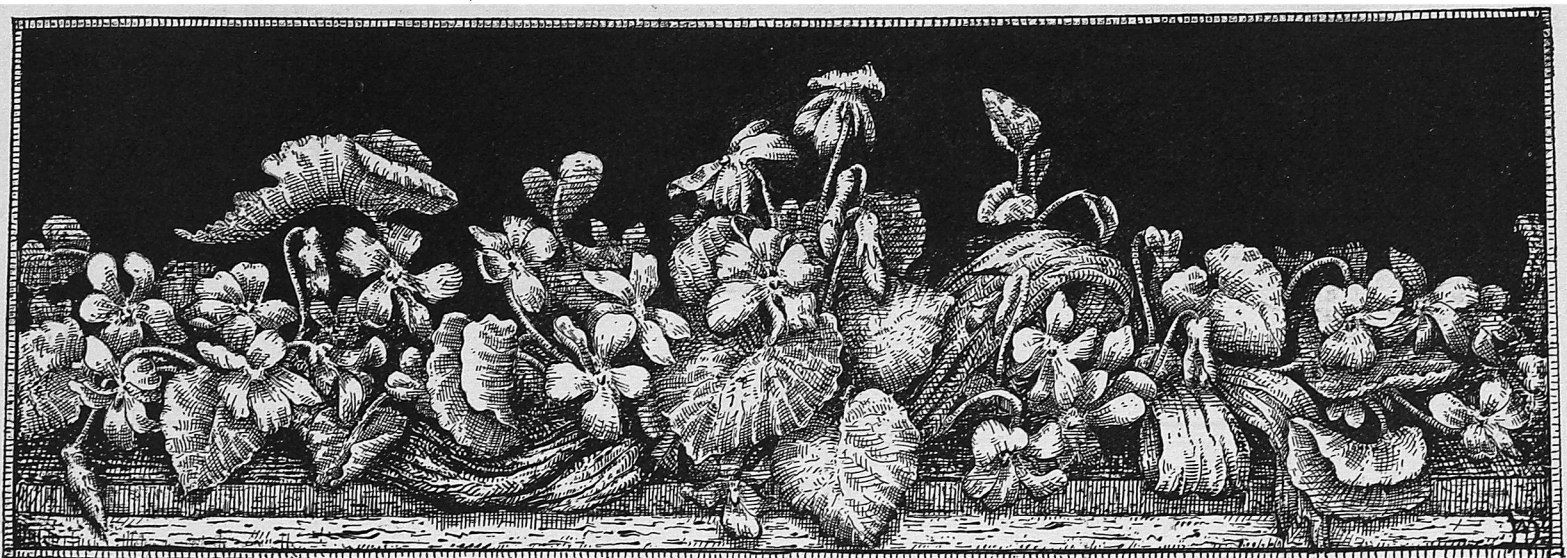
The vigor of the preceding mode is still apparent, and the chair is all the nobler for it. One may like or dislike the "cabriole" leg—as the trade calls it—as one pleases, but that there is something exclusively shapely about this underpart cannot be denied. Such a high back as this, too, adorned by specially woven tapestry, makes a truly noble upholstery picture, and with a seat in accordance, and the frame gilded, chair magnificence could not much further go.

By way of showing the class of dining room chairs which are now in vogue in many a Parisian *salle à manger*, I give a couple of designs, Nos. 7 and 12. Both have been touched with that spindle epidemic which so sorely afflicted us a few years ago, but it is in neither case overdone. No. 7 demonstrates how nicely a shaped panel may be filled with specially designed leather or tapestry. The pad in the back is just where it should be to keep the decoration which is below from grinding into the back of the sitter. The same may be said of No. 12, and the underparts of these two chairs represent the acme of good construction.

There is an admirable style of upholstery—if it can be so described—which finds much favor on the Continent but does not seem to take root in this country. I refer to the custom of using stamped hides for the mounting of chairs which are subjected to extra wear and tear. The durability of these goods cannot be questioned, and their decorative effect is certainly not behind any plain or buttoned leather. Indeed, some of the Renaissance leather panels, specially designed to suit the shape of the chairs which they adorn, are the making of a Parisian dining-room suite, and such ornamentation has the merit of being quite legitimate.

So much for some modern upholstery, which at the present time takes the lead in the showrooms of Paris. Before, however, bringing these notes to a close, I may just introduce a chair from the banks of the Seine which possesses, in addition to its evident artistic merits, some historical associations of no little moment. It is shown in illustration No. 15, and represents a chair which was Voltaire's favorite resting-place toward the end of his days. During the long life of that famous French wit he saw the three leading furniture styles of France evolved. He was educated by Louis le Grand, and suffered in consequence of writing lampoons on Louis Quatorze. After a long life in which the light of Court favor and the shade of the prison strangely intermingled, we find him in 1778 resting his aged bones in this sturdy but elegant Louis Seize chair. This valuable relic is now in the possession of Mr. Arnold B. Mitchell.

This old seat might awaken many memories, but I will content myself with one which has to do with Voltaire's worthy efforts to found an industrial community at Ferney, a village in the Pays de Gex. His presence gave new life to the manufacturers of that place. Many ingenious artisans were attracted there, and Voltaire acted as a sort of agent for them, sending their works to Russia, Germany, Spain, Italy and Holland. That venture clearly shows that he was an earnest supporter of the arts and crafts movement of his time, and that he possessed that veneration for the producer which is much to the fore in these socialistic days. If the good example set by the great French satirist were more generally followed by persons of influence, how greatly would some of the hands of our striving artificers be strengthened! Many a Chippendale in embryo might be brought to perfection, if some man of culture would take him by the hand and assist him, after the manner of Voltaire, to find a direct market for his productions.



VIOLETS, BY HARRY A. DEANE.